94. Union in Christ:

"Message to the Churches from the Uniting General Synod" and "Blessed Event"

(1957)

General Synod of the UCC; *The Plain Dealer*

At the conclusion of the Uniting General Synod, in which the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church celebrated the birth of the United Church of Christ, those in attendance sent out a "Message to the Churches from the Uniting General Synod." Addressed to "the Members of our Fellowship and to the Whole Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world," the message was signed by the leaders of the new denomination: moderators Louis W. Goebel and George W. Hastings; co-presidents Fred Hoskins and James E. Wagner; and co-secretaries Fred S. Buschmeyer and Sheldon E. Mackey.

Fully aware that their union was something extraordinary in the history of Protestantism in the United States, a union of two denominations with different national and cultural origins, different church polity and intradenominational structures, the synod's message affirmed the conviction that they had come together for theological, indeed christological, reasons. The two denominations had joined "because the

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Source: "Message to the Churches from the Uniting General Synod," in *Minutes of the Uniting General Synod of the United Church of Christ,* Cleveland, Ohio, 25–27 June 1957, 130–31; "Blessed Event," cartoon in *The Plain Dealer,* 27 June 1957.

two companies of Christians have held and hold the same basic belief, that Christ and Christ alone is Head of the Church. From Him derive the understanding of God as Father, the participation in the same Spirit, the doctrines of faith, the influence toward holiness, the duties of divine worship, the apprehension of the significance of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the observance of church order, the mutual love of Christians, and their dedication to the betterment of the world. To be drawn to Him is to be drawn to one another, and to acknowledge Him as Head is to feel pain in dismemberment one from the other."

The message also stated forcefully that although the General Synod enjoyed the new richness and depth that the union was bringing them, union was not a state once and for all achieved. Rather, it was "a process, informed by growth and adventure" and leading finally to "communion fulfilled in Christ."

The Plain Dealer, *the local Cleveland newspaper, also understood that the formation of the United Church of Christ was a new beginning. In a cartoon entitled "Blessed Event," the newspaper portrayed the arrival of the United Church of Christ as the birth of a baby brought by the proverbial stork—a baby that would grow and develop over a lifetime. In this case, the United Church of Christ had embarked upon a journey toward the union of all Christ's followers throughout the whole inhabited earth.*

Message to the Churches from the Uniting General Synod

To the Members of our Fellowship
And to the Whole Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world,
The United Church of Christ wishes grace and peace
From God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today for two hitherto separate communions of the Church of Jesus Christ the first step toward full union has been taken. Representatives of the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches and of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, meeting in the City of Cleveland in the State of Ohio in the United States of America, have bound themselves together in the presence of God to form the United Church of Christ.

The Evangelical and Reformed Church stems from the Protestant Reformation on the continent of Europe in the early sixteenth century. The Congregational Christian Churches trace their spiritual ancestry through the Pilgrim Fathers and the Puritans of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century in England and to later reform movements on this side of the Atlantic. Both have their Christian lineage through the Western Church, but they have not been members of the same body since Western Christendom ceased to be one. Their centuries of separation have now come to an end.

The Congregational Christian Churches belong to the International Congregational Council, the Evangelical and Reformed Church to the Alliance of the Reformed Churches Throughout the World Holding the Presbyterian Order. Now, following happy precedents in Canada, South India and elsewhere, two classical polities of Christian history have adjusted themselves to each other through union in such a way as to leave intact and effective the excellences of each. Differences in ecclesiastical procedure, which in sundry places and times have occasioned tensions and disorders, are appointed their secondary place and divested of evil effect.

This union has been made possible because the two companies of Christians have held and hold the same basic belief, that Christ and Christ alone is the Head of the Church. From Him derive the understanding of God as Father, the participation in the same Spirit, the doctrines of faith, the influence toward holiness, the duties of divine worship, the apprehension of the significance of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the observance of church order, the mutual love of Christians, and their dedication to the betterment of the world. To be drawn to Him is to be drawn to one another, and to acknowledge Him as Head is to feel pain in dismemberment one from the other. So the union has come.

At this moment of the joyous new access of life imparted by the union, the United Church of Christ is stricken in conscience at its continuing separation from the rest of the Church, and it prays for the day when the greater Church of Jesus Christ, now hindered and weakened by many divisions, will come to visible reality, one flock, one shepherd, through the influence of One who is alive in every part of His Church. To the elimination of useless and hurtful separations within the greater Church the United Church of Christ offers itself and its resources. Active participation in both the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America and the World Council of Churches has been an expression of this concern on the part of both of the uniting groups. Now united, but

recognizing that we are still under the judgment of an unfinished task, we pledge a continuance of that participation.

It is the belief of the United Church of Christ that all within the greater Church should accord to each other the fullest possible recognition and, where the Lord seems ready to bless organic union, should enter into that happier estate which answers radically and essentially His prayer that they all may be one.

We remind our, membership that the union of churches is in itself an empty objective save as it is made the means of conveying Christ's redemptive purpose to man in the realm both of personal and social life. In every particular church let us pray that there may be not only a new awareness that God has appointed us for a special witness in this day, but also that we are summoned to outdo our past in every ministry of worship, of Christian nurture, and of dedication to the broadening and deepening of God's kingdom in and among all men. We hold that when a church extends its duties only to its own members and assemblies, it has fallen away from the principal end of its institution: its very purpose on the human side is to edify the Church Universal, making disciples of all nations through a vital and enlightened missionary program.

We should instruct ourselves continually in the truth that union is not a state once and for all achieved. It is a deliberate process, informed by growth and adventure. A thousand new relationships must yet be woven into the fabric of the United Church of Christ. This cannot be without pain and tribulation; but with every day of patience and imaginative courage marking the emergence of the completed pattern, the time will come when our union shall be communion fulfilled in Christ.

The spiritual richness made available to us in our union is already unmistakably and deeply apprehended. We have suddenly become the heirs not of one line alone but of two lines of inheritance. Our minds have become the meeting place for two abundant streams of thought and practice. There are none of us who cannot feel, at this confluence, an enhancement of our inner life.

While we do not begin with the ultimate in all the dimensions of our hope, God has covenanted with His people that when they give His word free course and glorify it, as our union is designed to do, He is faithful: He "shall establish you, and keep you from evil." Our union brings forth treasures old and new. The old treasures we intend to conserve; we turn toward the new in limitless anticipation, praising God for the beginnings of the United Church of Christ.

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that

we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

By the Co-Secretaries:
FRED S. BUSCHMEYER
SHELDON E. MACKEY

The Moderators:
LOUIS W. GOEBEL
GEORGE B. HASTINGS
The Co-Presidents:
FRED HOSKINS
JAMES E. WAGNER

The twenty-fifth day of June in the Year of our Lord 1957

The General Synod of the United Church of Christ